

Fifth Street Retaining Wall
Fifth Street between Grand and Flower Streets
Los Angeles
Los Angeles County
California

HABS No. CA-2150

HABS
CAL.
19-LOSAN,
60-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service, Western Region
450 Golden Gate Avenue, Box 36063
San Francisco, California 94102

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

FIFTH STREET RETAINING WALL

HABS NO.
CA-2150

1. Location: Fifth Street between Grand and Flower Streets
Los Angeles, Ca.
2. Present Owner: City of Los Angeles
3. Present Occupant: Not Applicable
4. Present Use: Retaining wall with enclosed stairway
5. Significance: The primary significance of the wall is through its association with the Los Angeles Public Library (a National Register landmark) and the Edison Building. The connection between the wall and the library is made through the duplication of architectural detail and the fact that Carlton Winslow, the architect for the library, designed a number of different plans for the wall itself. To date, no drawing of Winslow's has been located which depicts the wall as built. However, the fact that designs for the wall were prepared by Winslow indicate that in terms of both the enclosure of space and as a visual element, the retaining wall across the street from the Library was linked to the library at a very early date. The later duplication of the detailing of the pilasters of the wall with those on the library serves to strengthen this implication.

The connection between the wall and the Edison Building is made by the fact that Allison and Allison designed the bay in the wall adjacent to the Edison Building.

The wall is clearly an important visual element along Fifth Street. Its association with the Public Library and the Edison Building adds to its historical and architectural significance.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of Erection: 1930 (City of Los Angeles building permits and "as-builts" DL 801-DL 806)
2. Architects: City of Los Angeles, Allison and Allison
Allison and Allison - The firm of Allison and Allison designed a large number of significant structures throughout the Southwest, and in particular in Southern California.

The firm was responsible for supervising design plans for the University of California at Los Angeles. In addition to the Friday Morning Club and the Southern California Edison Company Building, Allison and Allison designed the University Club, Shakespeare Club, and the Women's Athletic Club.

Senior member of this firm was David Clark Allison. Born in 1881, Allison was educated at the University of Pennsylvania and later studied at the Ecole Des Beaux Arts, Paris. Allison moved to Los Angeles in 1910 and immediately established a successful practice in architecture.

3. Original and Subsequent Owners: City of Los Angeles
 4. Builder: Unknown
 5. Original Plans and Construction: The original plans, DL-801 to DL-806, are on file in the City of Los Angeles, Bureau of Engineering vault in City Hall.
 6. Alterations and Additions: None
- B. Historical Context: The Fifth Street Retaining Wall was built in the spring and summer of 1930. The Los Angeles Public Library was built in 1924. The library site was formerly the site of the State Normal School, predecessor to UCLA. The City of Los Angeles acquired the property from the State in 1922 when the Normal School moved to Vermont Avenue (now the site of Los Angeles City College). During the period of Normal School occupancy, Fifth Street ended at the Normal School gates just west of Grand Avenue. Although the City of Los Angeles owned a right-of-way through the site for the extension of Fifth Street, that right-of-way was not developed until grading commenced on the Library. (pers. comm: Harrison Kimball, Bureau of Engineering).

Fifth Street and the Library seem to have been built at about the same time. However, Fifth Street was quite narrow and if there was a retaining wall across from the Library, it consisted either of earth or wood until 1930. (pers. comm: Harrison Kimball). The 1929 "as-builts" indicate that Fifth Street was widened when the existing wall was built and modifications were made to the sidewalk and curbing of Upper Fifth Street in 1930.

There is only circumstantial evidence to suggest a connection between the construction of the Edison Building and construction of the wall. The Edison Building with its underground parking would have required a significant amount of grading. Site preparations for the Edison

Building appear to have coincided with the City of Los Angeles' desire to widen Fifth Street and to build a permanent retaining wall. The two activities were coordinated when Allison and Allison were given responsibility for designing the wall bay that serves as an entrance to the underground parking at the Edison Building.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The Fifth Street Retaining Wall extends from the corner of Fifth and Grand to the west side of the end of Hope Street. The wall is parallel to Fifth on the north side of the street. It varies in height from approximately four feet at the east end to approximately twenty-five feet at the west end.

At the foot of Hope Street there is an arcaded double stairway. The detailing of the majority of the wall consists of flat pilasters attached to the wall surface. The detailing of the cap of the pilaster is nearly identical to that of the pilasters on the Los Angeles Public Library across the street.

The pilasters divide the wall into bays. One of the bays is of distinctly different design than the rest of the wall. This single bay was designed by Allison and Allison as part of the Edison Company Building. It is executed in concrete and stone.

The wall stands virtually unaltered, and it fits quite well into the existing streetscape.

2. Condition of Fabric: fair

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all Dimensions: The wall has a 350' frontage. It varies in height from approximately four feet at the east end to approximately twenty-five feet at the west end.
2. Foundations: Reinforced concrete
3. Walls: The structure consists of a single wall with flat pilasters attached to the wall surface.
4. Structural System, Framing: Reinforced concrete
5. Porches, Stoops, Balconies, Bulkheads: none
6. Chimneys: none
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and Doors: A single entrance is cut into the wall surface. It is designed in a manner similar

to that of the Edison Building. An arcaded and arched double stairway terminates the western end of the structure.

b. Windows and Shutters: none

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: none

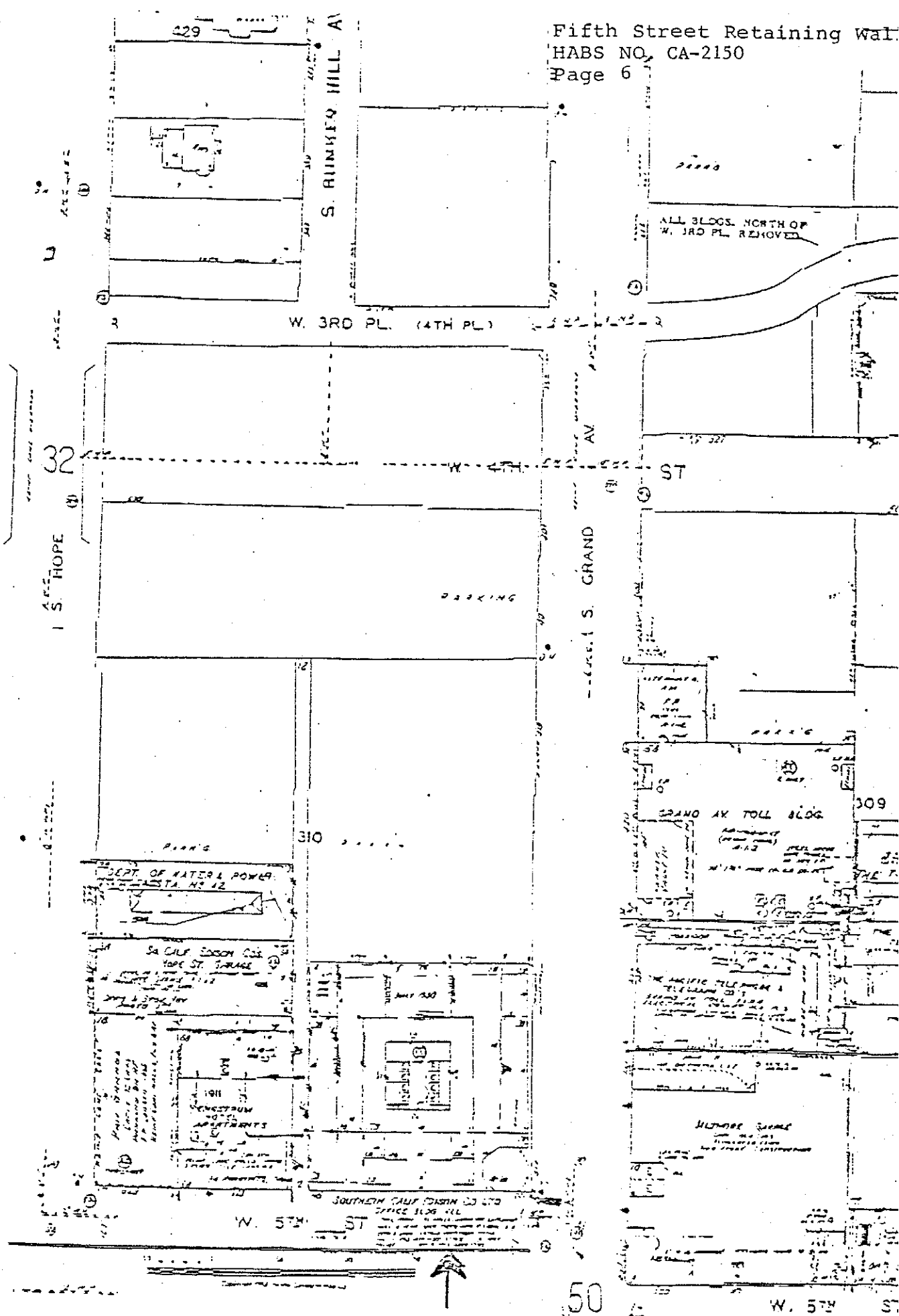
b. Cornice, Eaves: none

c. Dormers, Cupolas, Towers: none

C. Description of the Interior: not applicable

D. Site:

1. General Setting and Orientation: The Fifth Street Retaining Wall extends from the corner of Fifth Street and Grand Avenue, along the north side of Fifth Street to the end of Hope Street. The wall is oriented in a generally east to west direction. It is an integral part of the streetscape and is architecturally associated with the Los Angeles Public Library.
2. Historic Landscape Design: The wall was initially built as a portion of the Fifth Street landscape/streetscape. None of the present landscape features associated with the wall are historically significant. However, the street lamps along Fifth Street are visually as much a part of the streetscape as the wall itself.
3. Outbuildings: none



PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Bibliography

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

City of Los Angeles, Bureau of Engineering,
Vault of maps and drawings (Los Angeles City
Hall: As built drawings No. DL-801 to DL-806,
1929, 1930).

City of Los Angeles, Department of Building and
Safety, building permits

City of Los Angeles, Department of Planning,
Land Use Planning and Management System

Kimball, Harrison, City of Los Angeles, Bureau
of Engineering, personal communication

Los Angeles Public Library Vault, Various Plans
for the Fifth Street Retaining Wall
(unbound: various dates from 1924 to 1929)

2. Secondary Sources:

Baists Real Estate Atlas of Los Angeles
(G. W. Baist Co., Philadelphia, Pa.: 1905)

Hatheway, Roger G., "Historic Building Survey:
Request for Determination of Eligibility"
(Los Angeles Downtown People Mover Program:
January, 1979).

Sanborn Map Company, Los Angeles Fire Insurance Maps
(New York: 1883, 1927, 1958).

Works Projects Administration, Los Angeles Drawings
(Los Angeles: 1939).

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PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Los Angeles Downtown People Mover Project, supported by a demonstration grant from the Urban Mass Transportation Administration, is proposing to build an automated, grade-separated transit system in downtown Los Angeles.

A portion of the route as proposed would run along the northern sidewalk of Fifth Street, directly in front of the Fifth Street retaining wall. Locating the DPM in front of the wall will not require alterations to the structure, but will create a new visual element in front of the structure. A portion of the wall on the west side of Hope Street (not part of the retaining wall) will be cut through to allow access to the Wells Fargo mezzanine and DPM Library Station. DPM patrons will be able to exit the station through that opening and proceed down the enclosed staircase in the wall to Fifth Street.